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AUTHOR Allison, Desmond
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ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on how teachers and administrators share a commitment towards the general principle of accountability in regard to efficiency in educational programs. The notion of efficiency is shown to have limited application to complex multidimensional processes, including those of classroom language learning and of language program evaluation. These points are illustrated by reference to a summary account of an evaluation study at the University of Hong Kong. (Author/JL)

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Can English Enhancement Programmes be Efficient?

Desmond Allison[1]

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Talk of efficiency in educational programmes invites controversy. The discussion in this paper assumes that teachers and administrators share a commitment towards the general principle of accountability. The notion of efficiency, on the other hand, is shown to have limited application to complex multidimensional processes, including those of classroom language learning and of language programme evaluation. These points are illustrated by reference to a summary account of an evaluation study at the University of Hong Kong (HKU).

Introduction

The evaluation of second-language educational programmes and 'projects' has become an important area of activity, not least in a climate where funding bodies and others attach much importance to 'accountability' in education. It is, however, an area in which simple answers are hard to come by and in which notions of objectivity are challenged (Alderson and Beretta, 1992, passim, reviewed in this journal). Do such complexity and relativity of viewpoints offer essential insights into the nature of things, or are they, as administrators might fear, merely symptoms of fashionably evasive academic malaise?

Looked at in another way, can we regard the evaluation of programmes as a proper and wholly necessary activity within second-language teaching, and throughout education? Or is programme evaluation in danger of becoming subsumed within what Pennycook (1990, p.557) terms a "conservative call for accountability", imposing a narrow preoccupation with means that precludes enquiry into the legitimacy of educational ends?

I would like to start from the assumption, which I take to be largely uncontroversial, that 'accountability' is in principle a reasonable expectation on the part of those funding, designing, teaching on or studying in a teaching programme. (The general principle of accountability is certainly not contested by Pennycook: spoken communication.) Given this assumption, it appears reasonable to suppose that people who design and teach a course or programme of studies may at times properly be called upon to explain to others what it is that they are doing, why this is being done, what benefits are accruing to learners, what difficulties persist, and so on. In practice, of course, particular calls for accountability can give rise to legitimate concerns over differing value systems, especially in contexts of unequal power relations. It may be worth remarking that any concerns that educators might feel about the specifics of an evaluation process will normally only be effectively communicated to representatives of a funding body within a climate of clearly shared commitment to the general principle of accountability for money spent and work done.

Care over words is important here. To expect people to 'account for' their exercise of responsibility and judgement, not least in a context where public funding needs also to be 'accounted for', is a position that we can usefully distinguish from 'calling people to account'; the latter phrase suggests an exercise of power that could beg questions of the accountability of all concerned groups. While actual practice will need to be rigorously scrutinised, there does not seem to be any reason in principle for

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[1] **Desmond Allison** is a Senior Lecturer in the English Centre, The University of Hong Kong. His earlier teaching experience includes posts in Botswana, Brunei, China, Hong Kong and Nigeria. His main research interests are in areas of reading comprehension, second language writing and EAP course evaluation.

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commitment to accountability to exclude critical appraisals of values and ends as well as means.

The notion of 'efficiency', I shall argue, proves more problematic in this respect. Although efficiency seems self-evidently preferable to inefficiency, any such comparison presupposes that 'efficiency' is an appropriate criterion for the evaluation of some area of activity. This assumption can easily beg prior questions about goals. In contrast to the broader concept of accountability, the notion of efficiency appears to be inherently tied to a cost-benefit and instrumentalist view of the achievement of some agreed, assumed or imposed goal, particularly one that is expressible in terms of 'the market culture'. In this connection, Fraser (1992) cites the "angry, radical critique" that Pat Kane ("singer, Scottish Nationalist and rector of the University of Glasgow") makes of contemporary changes in university education generally:

> Efficiency is a weasel word... It's seeing the university as a factory where people are given identifiable, quantifiable market skills which plug into an entrepreneurial vision of society...But higher education should be a more exploratory affair and the university more a community of scholars. (Kane, as cited in Fraser, 1992, p.28.)

Traditional (and perhaps stereotypical) prejudices apart, a community of scholars will not necessarily look askance at an entrepreneurial vision of society, but it can certainly and properly be expected to explore and question such a world view, among other world views and value systems. 'Efficiency', however, is not a notion that readily takes different viewpoints and values into account. As the philosopher E. Gellner (1985) observes: "The notion of efficiency presupposes not merely an external world, it presupposes a single world." (p.69, emphasis in original).

Most people concerned with language programmes in education might be happy to presuppose the reality of an external world. (My review of Alderson and Beretta, 1992, briefly takes up this issue in the light of comments by Davies, 1992.) The notion of a single world, however, is problematic in relation to important preoccupations in education, including matters of immediate import in language teaching circles, such as judgements among different cultural or occupational groups over what may constitute appropriate language use. While we shall discuss prospects and problems for agreement on a single goal, 'to improve the learners' English' - a goal that sounds quite reasonable to many people - the need to recognise a diversity of world views and hence of worlds will first bear further elaboration.

In expressing concerns over "a growing incursion of technical rationality into all domains of human investigation", Pennycook (1990, p.556) points to the danger that any such trend will impose a single way of thinking, especially if this is associated with an imposition of social control. Pennycook continues: "The belief that improvement can be brought about by the correct application of rational organization is what Marcuse (1964) came to criticize as 'one dimensional'. It is a view that disregards all notions of the political in social life."

Part of the difficulty, not least for evaluation studies in education, is that believers in technical rationality and efficiency are liable to presuppose the rightness of the ends they pursue, and may tend to be dismissive or oblivious of other perspectives and concerns.

Before we despair of the benefits of rational organisation - or before we set aside Pennycook's misgivings - let us notice a linguistic point. Pennycook's use of a singular form appears important to the argument about how 'improvement' is liable to be regarded and pursued. A plural form might more readily suggest the possibility of seeing 'improvements' along multiple parameters, each relative to limited perspectives and goals. Rational organisation, including measures of efficiency, might then more easily be judged able to inform enquiry without imposing one single overall perspective.

Even if the last point is allowed, it leads to another question: what are the bearings of various 'improvements' upon an overall evaluative account of 'improvement'? This issue has immediate practical

importance, the more so as 'better in every respect' is rarely a feasible option in practice. It is interesting that Pennington's (1990) rejoinder to Pennycook should have sought both to broaden the perspective being taken on evaluation (p.560) and to dissociate evaluation from efficiency (p.562), suggesting perhaps that advocates of evaluation do perceive a need to take account of a number of goals rather than a single goal. A pursuit of accountability will then have to consider the claims of different 'improvements' that may compete for resources, and to allow for the prospect that what is 'an improvement' from one point of view will not always appear so from another.

The relationship between a broader perspective and multiple perspectives will need further appraisal. While 'improvement' is easily made plural, 'efficiency' as a concept has more global pretensions, and the word does not pluralise so readily. The unidimensionality of 'efficiency' appears to constitute a persistent problem for its role in programme evaluation and its relation to accountability.

What can English enhancement programmes achieve?

The relationship between improvements and 'improvement' brings us to the issue of the overall goal and subgoals of an educational programme, and more specifically of an English enhancement programme. An abstract discussion of the overall goal of such a programme might appear otiose: what is wrong with 'to improve the learners' English'? On the other hand, an evaluation that takes account of practical constraints of time and resources will need to deconstruct this proposed goal, and to point towards difficult choices among possible aspects or sources of such overall improvement.

'Improving the learners' English' could imply in operational terms that the goal of an English enhancement programme should be to bring about gains on some acceptable measure of English language proficiency. This also suggests that such general improvement would be both necessary (or at least highly desirable) and clearly realisable within the timescale and circumstances of the programme. Even if we assume for the moment that improvement in general proficiency is desired, it may not be achievable on a short course for advanced learners. Alderson (1992) observes that proficiency tests "...are relatively inappropriate for use on evaluation studies", adding that: "In those evaluation designs where pre- and post-tests are required, it is typically the case that proficiency tests do not reveal much improvement" (p.284).

Alderson suggests that the reason that evaluators using language test instruments make so little use of "tailor-made achievement tests" is that the measurement of achievement is so difficult; ready-made proficiency tests, even if not appropriate, can be temptingly convenient. A second reason that Alderson's discussion does not directly consider is that specific achievement outcomes may prove to be of only limited interest to influential audiences (such as administrators or business people) that are at a distance from the educational process.

The main reason that proficiency tests may be deemed 'relatively inappropriate' for evaluation studies appears to be practical rather than conceptual. Technically, the unidimensionality of a psychometric measure of proficiency has been shown by Henning (1992) to be compatible with a multidimensional psychological construct of what actually constitutes proficiency. (To indicate this fact about measurement is not to deny that probabilistic methods of analysis need to be used judiciously, as Henning also makes clear.) A proficiency measure could in principle offer a 'line of best fit' to summarise a complex record of language abilities exhibited in test performance. Various refinements of argument notwithstanding, it also seems reasonable to expect that a marked improvement in general proficiency should normally follow from, and contribute to, substantial improvements in achievement recorded over a sufficiently wide range of areas of language use.

But this last expectation really only says that students could do most things much more effectively in English if their English was much better than it is, and vice versa! Practically, the statement only

suggests a proficiency basis for assessing the efficiency of an enhancement programme that is of sufficient intensity and duration for marked gains in overall proficiency to be realisable. (A difficulty in evaluating such programmes may then be to distinguish their contribution from other conditions affecting the development of language proficiency.)

The desirability in principle of an improvement in the English proficiency of second-language learners of English may appear self-evident. In real terms, however, concerns over 'efficiency' serve to remind us that any such benefit will carry a cost. It is consequently worth asking, rather than uncritically assuming, what an appropriate proficiency target would be for any group of learners. In particular, one can challenge the automatic adoption of a 'deficit' view of the command of a language that has been achieved by any group of second-language learners - that is to say, a view that invariably portrays this command as inadequate by comparison with native speaker proficiency. Learners' second language proficiency is, after all, a benefit that is added to their proficiency in at least one other language (see Cook, 1992). The existing proficiency of advanced language learners may be viewed positively, as a considerable resource. An enhancement programme might then properly seek to bring about better returns on that resource by ensuring it is put to the most effective uses.

In programmes of restricted scope, specific forms of achievement will, in any analysis, need to be identified and measured if one wishes to establish that learning has taken place (and if statements about 'gain' are desired or required by others). 'Efficiency' in bringing about improvement in relation to one form of achievement (and also in assessing such improvement) will need to be offset against other potentially worthwhile uses of enhancement time when such programmes are evaluated in accountability terms.

There can be real difficulties in reaching an agreement on teaching priorities, even for example on the importance of spoken versus written English, when teaching time is severely limited. Prioritising different goals in terms of perceived value and achievability will entail negotiation and explanation, leading at best to achievements that still fall short of an ideal of overall improvement in English. Examples of such achievements might involve improvements in making a spoken presentation to an audience; participating in a seminar discussion; organising a written report; editing and proofreading a draft essay. A further difficulty is that, although measurable gains in aspects of language performance may best be attained through teacher-directed activities, emphasis on such work may conflict with long-term goals of encouraging more independent learning behaviour. Given such considerations, arguments for the recognition and 'triangulation' of multiple perspectives in evaluation studies become crucial in pursuing programme accountability.

Evaluation criteria for English enhancement programmes: A summary case study

To illustrate this discussion of how concerns for improvement (and efficiency) on various 'achievement' dimensions might relate to overall programme accountability, a summary account of one evaluation study will now be presented. The potential value of such a 'case study' approach to programme evaluation is discussed in my review in this journal of Alderson and Beretta (1992).

Alderson (1992) has observed that the main concern of programme evaluators must be: "...to obtain results that can be used, and to make recommendations that can be followed."(pp.298-299). He also calls upon evaluators to evaluate evaluations, as this will help to improve the evaluation process.

With these comments in mind, I offer an account of one stage in the evaluation of English enhancement programmes at The University of Hong Kong (HKU), namely the preparation of the evaluation report submitted in June 1992 by HKU to the University and Polytechnic Grants Committee (UPGC). Summary treatment is indicated for reasons of space. The paper then discusses the relationship between efficiency and accountability in the context of these English enhancement

programmes.

Profile of the evaluation

Several of the subheadings that follow (those shown in inverted commas) are selected from Alderson (1992), whose evaluation guidelines offer a convenient summarising framework for a case study. Brief commentary is included after most sections.

"Purpose: Why?" The stated aims of this evaluation (in abridged form) were:

(a) to outline developments in English enhancement within first-degree curricula at HKU;
(b) to present a summative evaluation of the English enhancement course taught in the Faculty of Social Sciences in 1991/92;
(c) to offer recommendations for the continuation and further development of the University s English enhancement programme.

Plans for the HKU English enhancement programme included the phased introduction of first-year courses in English enhancement/ academic communication/ professional and technical communication throughout all undergraduate curricula (with implementation from 1990 to 1995). Accountability was and remains important to the maintenance and later supplementation of funding for the programme, which was introduced in a context of concerns being expressed in Hong Kong educational and business circles over ('falling'?) language standards in tertiary education, and education generally.

"Audience:Who For?" The Report was written for the UPGC, and would be studied by a subcommittee of academics (from outside the tertiary sector in Hong Kong) looking into language enhancement programmes in all UPGC funded institutions. The Vice-Chancellor and other senior members of HKU were another audience, representing sponsors for the programme within HKU. A third audience was the group of course designers and teachers directly involved in English enhancement work. Other staff and student representatives might also consult the final Report. The decision to write one report (plus summary overview), rather than separate reports for different purposes and audiences, arose from a combination of time limitations and an optimistic belief in the sharing of professional information.

"The evaluator: Who?" The Report was initially drafted for an ad hoc evaluation committee by one writer (myself), and was revised in the light of comments received from committee members. The Report drew upon in-house questionnaire findings and summaries of staff-student consultative meetings prepared by teachers on the course. My own role in the English Centre included respons.bilities in English enhancement programme development. I had previously taught on the pilot course in Social Sciences, but was teaching on another course in 1991/92. (Was this 'internal', 'external' or perhaps 'peripheral' evaluation?)

"Content: What?" Alderson's question relates both to course content and to the content of an evaluation. An evaluation takes account of stated course objectives, but also considers other observed outcomes.

The aims and objectives of the enhancement course offered to Social Science students at HKU were described in the Report as shown below, the description being derived from the course designers. The objectives are diverse (which does not make them incompatible) and open to finer specification. Given the limited timescale, diversity in student attainments in respect of the different objectives would appear a likely outcome:

> The course recognises the work students have done at school and is designed to build upon existing knowledge. It is not designed to remedy problems carried over from

school, but rather to enhance students' academic communication and study skills. More specifically, the course aims to enable students to:

(a) understand and interpret academic texts, lectures and seminars
(b) identify and extract relevant information from these inputs
(c) integrate information from different sources and organise it in a logical manner for a given purpose
(d) express clearly both in speech and writing a range of academic response types including summary, evaluation and application
(e) discriminate between alternative learning strategies and apply them as appropriate.

The objectives are those of one enhancement course. The 'content' of the English enhancement programme as a whole will be discussed more fully below. This discussion will propose a contrast between courses (to be evaluated on their own terms) and more comprehensive programmes (providing for English enhancement throughout academic curricula) that could be important for considerations of responsibility and accountability.

"Method: How?" The sources consulted in preparing the report comprised course descriptions and materials; previous evaluation reports; student and staff questionnaire responses; notes of staff-student and of teacher group meetings; discussions that committee members held with staff and students; observation of oral presentations and study of written work; staff seminar on the course; student society questionnaire on the course, reported in student magazine; academic papers relating to the course; discussion with staff and students of the draft Report.

The list reveals a major concern with perceptions of value and of student progress, with the acceptability of the enhancement programme to students and staff, and with the impact of the programme on the educational context it was intended to influence (see Alderson, 1992, pp.281-282). Judgements by staff (English teachers and Faculty members) were based partly on direct observation and in-course assessment of spoken presentations and writing. End-of-course results, which were still awaited when the report was written, would have offered fuller information about what students could or could not do (well) after completing the course, though not in a directly comparable 'pre-test/ post-test' form. (Pre- and post-tests of oral English in a seminar-style setting have since been added to the course.) Despite this omission, the evaluation drew upon a wide range of sources, methods and expressed views.

The draft report was read by committee members, who included Faculty and student representatives, in conjunction with the above written sources. Depending on their roles and experiences, committee members also reported on student work they had observed, read or done. The need for an executive-style summary report was identified at this stage, and this reinforced the need for overall clarity despite the complexities.

"Timing: When to evaluate?" The ad hoc committee was formed fairly late in the academic year. The course evaluation was consequently summative, with parameters that could only be established retrospectively and with reference to such information as had been or could still be collected. (This information included in-house questionnaire findings and reports of discussions dating from midway through the course.)

Reported outcomes. Outcomes noted in the Report included Social Science student perceptions of benefit from their course. On the mid-course questionnaire, completed by 272 respondents, 93% acknowledged some perceived improvement; however, the frequency of "a little" (68%) rather than "quite a lot" (23%) or "a lot" (2%) gave no grounds for complacency. More specific outcomes suggested that improvement in spoken English was more widely achieved (or perceived) than in written English, and that project work was found comparatively more effective, but self-access work less so than the course in general. Students tended to value spoken English highly, while Faculty tended to express persistent

concerns over essay writing.

Extension of project work for fuller development of oral presentation and report writing in particular was recommended by a majority of students. Comments recorded by subject teachers on their perceptions of student performance at the end of the course were mostly in the categories "much better" or "slightly better than expected" for spoken presentations, discussion and questioning skills, but not for essay writing. Language teachers, perhaps unsurprisingly, had more "as expected" ratings for these dimensions of student performance.

Recommendations. These concerned the following areas:

- greater integration of enhancement teaching within first-degree curricula, in terms of formal requirements, incentives for involvement of subject teachers, and efforts towards greater consistency in communicative expectations;
- clearer course outlines and descriptions;
- specification of assessment criteria;
- recommendations to course writers on skills development; projects and practical tasks that challenge learners; student groupings; more explicit structuring of self-access learning opportunities; student motivation; provision for individual needs and difficulties;
- recognition that "academic" curricula also function as preparations for life beyond the university, including professional communication and activity;
- a call for course designers and language testers to "seek to specify further and to demonstrate clearly the achievable gains made during future courses, while maintaining a balance in the design between long-term goals and achievable objectives";
- an emphasis on the importance of student perceptions of and attitudes to the course, and on increasing student responsibility for learning;
- a call for evaluators to become familiar with the course as it takes place.

"Deadlines, deliverables and dust: What happens to an evaluation report?" Within the university, the call for efforts to integrate English enhancement teaching more fully within first-degree curricula has been followed by decisions in two Faculties (Social Sciences and Engineering) to establish enhancement courses as normal full or half courses within first-year undergraduate degree programmes. Suggestions for incentives to involve subject teachers more actively, in part to establish greater curricular consistency in communicative expectations, have not elicited much response, perhaps because of wider resourcing preoccupations.

The pedagogic recommendations in the Report have been acted upon, but this is mainly because these recommendations served to focus on insights and perceptions that course designers had already attained.

Despite efforts already being made, more clearly needs to be done in response to the call for course designers and language testers to "seek to specify further and to demonstrate clearly the achievable gains made during future courses...". A practical difficulty has been that, at a time of rapid programme and staffing expansion, considerable efforts have already to be expended on maintaining existing levels of practice, such as assessor training for continuous assessment and for test marking. (See Lewkowicz, 1992 for fuller discussion.) To date, the clearest instance of successful achievement testing on English courses (for Arts and Social Science students) has been the significant predominance of positive gain scores in comparisons of pre- and post-tests of oral English.

The recommendations addressed to future evaluation teams, encouraging course evaluators to become familiar with the course as a process, could not formally be pursued in the subsequent year, in the absence of a decision by the university to identify such a team before the end of teaching. Enhancement course teachers have nonetheless continued to involve subject lecturers in class observation

and joint assessment of student performance, so that some 'outside' observers could become familiar with course processes.

Discussion

It was earlier argued that pursuit of 'efficiency' presupposes a single goal that is generally agreed to be the right goal, and that must also be attainable. This is problematic for an English enhancement programme, which is likely to pursue several goals that may be more or less effectively attained at varying costs in terms of time, effort and money. The relative importance of these goals is, in turn, a matter on which views are likely to differ. In the HKU case study, for example, perceived progress in spoken English appeared to be achievable at lower cost in time and effort than might be needed for progress in academic essay writing, and was also highly valued by many students; on the other hand, many Faculty members attached great importance to essay writing.

Questions about the setting of goal priorities apply also to an evaluation itself. Evidence of success, in any form, is not obtained without a considerable investment of resources, and evidence for 'improvements' of some kinds will require more sustained investment than others. Typically, questionnaire data about perceived usefulness is relatively easy to obtain, whereas evidence of improved task performance is more costly.

Ultimately, the principle of 'accountability' calls for judgement and interpretation of the value of a programme as a whole, and not a mere listing of various degrees of success by various efficiency measures. The case study has suggested the evaluator's responsibility to take different measures and viewpoints into account, yet also to produce a clear overview and recommendations that can be defended. The evaluator's own perspective must be made clear in the course of a report, and the evaluator will be accountable to the various user groups for the selection, presentation and interpretation of evidence in the report: the credibility of an evaluation itself is a matter for user appraisal.

As Alderson (1992, p.295) makes clear, the obligation on evaluators to be explicit about their stance and its rationale is not always matched in practice by any corresponding requirement on administrators or funders to specify and account for their own reactions to an evaluation, or for subsequent decision-making. Often, however, there are a number of distinct user groups with power and influence of different kinds, so that wider dialogue and a form of mutual accountability is encouraged. For example, the HKU report was carefully read in the UPGC, together with similar reports from other institutions, and formed a basis for correspondence and meetings with university representatives in which future policy directions were discussed and representations were made.

Part of the UPGC response to the set of evaluation reports was to note the diversity of parameters by which different students were being assessed, and different programmes evaluated, and to seek guidance from the universities and polytechnics concerned on the possibility of applying standardised parameters across different language enhancement programmes. This notion raises serious difficulties, but it will be important for accountability purposes that the issues should be faced up to. A combination of explanation and positive action will be necessary (and has begun). These concerns lead us back to questions about the viability and usefulness of proficiency and achievement testing on programmes of this nature.

The need for enough time and intensity to bring about demonstrable gain in a measure of general English proficiency has already been intimated. There are possible riders, such as the rapid effect that test-specific coaching might have on performance on that particular test, but the basic point remains clear. English enhancement courses at HKU last for a maximum of 60 hours, thinly spread over two semesters (September to April), yet a typical student has already had substantial previous experience of English language classrooms over more than a decade. 'General' measures of gain (or 'general' comparisons with control groups, were this practicable) cannot reasonably be expected to show convincing

results in such circumstances - a point that is made in just these terms in the 1992 Report to UPGC.

A diversity of achievement parameters for different courses was recognised as appropriate in discussions with the UPGC subcommittee. Course developers were encouraged to provide evidence of improvement in specific respects. Such evidence, though, will require considerable effort to obtain, and its value will remain a matter of interpretation when other possible achievement parameters are compared. Quantifiable evidence about student numbers, or about student and staff perceptions of progress and of problems, is already welcome for accountability purposes. A trade-off between immediate gain and encouragement of learning in the longer term was also appreciated by all.

Although further work on assessment measures that can establish achievement on English enhancement courses will obviously be helpful, there remains a longer-term need, acknowledged in the HKU Report to UPGC, for measures to establish the presence or absence of gains in proficiency as a function of students' entire experience of English throughout university curricula. It was earlier argued that gains on a general measure of proficiency (as opposed to specific achievement measures) were an unrealistic expectation for a 60-hour course, but it was certainly not suggested that effects upon English proficiency are irrelevant in principle to an enhancement programme. If a course is intended as just one part of a strategy to promote English enhancement throughout English-medium undergraduate curricula that extend over at least a three-year period, then the eventual outcome of that strategy becomes a proper issue in the evaluation of an enhancement programme. This observation has far-reaching implications for the sharing of responsibility between English teaching units and subject teaching departments.

A concern over changes in English proficiency as a function of English-medium university education gives rise to crucial questions about the place of language, and of English in particular, in different curricula, and about the nature of the education being offered through these curricula. While it is clear that, as stated in the Report to UPGC, "intensive use of English throughout a university curriculum ought definitely to lead to demonstrable gain in a measure of general English proficiency", it cannot just be assumed that actual curricula necessarily provide for such intensive use. Indeed, individual staff and students in some Faculties have at times observed that English enhancement courses serve a purpose in preventing English standards from worsening, in cases where the academic curricula are seen to make rather few linguistic demands on students. The success of an enhancement strategy, therefore, must eventually be judged in relation to each situation and the possibilities and constraints that it proves to offer.

There is clearly a need for a programme of research to establish what happens to the English language proficiency of students on different degree programmes. The biggest obstacle to a comprehensive evaluation of the success of English enhancement programmes is that not enough is known about the improvement, stagnation or attrition of proficiency that occurs as students follow their academic studies. Proficiency testing would play a role in such research, but there is also a need for ethnographic work to determine what language abilities, and what uses of English, are required - or avoided - on different academic programmes. At HKU, research proposals have recently been drawn up by members of the English Centre in pursuance of these ends. Research results in this area would be a worthwhile 'product' in their own right, and would lead to better informed discussion of possibilities and limitations.

Conclusion

Our discussion has suggested, in sum, that the accountability of an English enhancement programme will require:

(i) a variety of well-motivated statements about course-related improvements;
(ii) much fuller information about existing levels of proficiency at entry and at exit from

different undergraduate curricula;

(iii) critically informed discussion about the most effective use of limited resources to pursue strategies for English enhancement on undergraduate degree programmes in their entirety.

Such discussion must extend to the responsibilities of all concerned - the university authorities, subject departments, the English enhancement unit and the student body - in bringing about more effective communication as an integral part of a university education. This conclusion requires the adoption in theory, and the pursuit in practice, of a multi-dimensional view of accountability.

While the notion of efficiency remains relevant to particular aspects of taught courses, full programme accountability eludes any single dimension of measurement of gain. A final reflection is that other conventional academic review practices, notably that of sustained external evaluation by peers, may be worth extending to English enhancement courses and programmes in order to ensure value and quality control at a holistic level.

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